



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE RETURN OF THE SOUL

BY HUGO MÜNSTERBERG

“MARLEY was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about it. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.” When the burial of the “soul” occurred a few decades ago the register was signed by many more good people. Philosophers and biologists and psychologists and medical men and literary men all solemnly put their signatures to the register. It might have been difficult to decide which of them really officiated as clergyman and which as undertaker and which as chief mourner, but there is no doubt whatever about it—the soul was as dead as a door-nail.

A soul had indeed no longer any right to existence when the days of modern psychology began. The new idea was to treat mental life in the fashion of exact science and to handle the inner experiences of consciousness just as the chemist deals with the things on his laboratory table. Such a laboratory man sifts and filters until he finds the elements, and even what he calls the atoms to-day may be divided to-morrow still farther. Above all, he seeks the laws according to which those elements must move and combine. The modern students of the mental life have proudly proved that they are worthy disciples of the scientists. They have built their mental laboratories, too, and they have sifted and filtered the content of consciousness until they found the ultimate elements from which the ideas and emotions and memories and volitions are composed. They discovered the laws by which the sensations and affections and impulses combine. In short, they convinced the world with the authority of true scientists that the mind can be understood only if it is grasped in its atomistic structure and if everything is explained by exact psychological laws.

Laboratories sprung up like mushrooms after a summer rain; no dark mysteries were left; whatever happened in the mind

became perfectly explainable, and those who played the skeptic had to give up their doubt when finally the day of the practical test came. The psychologists had not promised too much; they could show that their formulæ were right; they could apply them just as the engineers apply the formulæ of physics. In education and law, in medicine and commerce and industry, in every field of social reform, the technique of the psychologist proved of value. His calculations must accordingly be correct; the mind is a mechanism in which causes and effects can be measured and in which every function is the result of thousands of elements.

How absurd and how ignorant it appears in the face of such modern ideas to speak the word soul! Soul means unity, and now the mental life is an endlessly composite structure. Soul, above all, means freedom, and now the mental life is an internal mechanism in which every effect follows from its causes with absolute necessity. Soul means exemption from the life of the body and its processes in days and years, and now the mental life is recognized as dependent upon the cells of the brain. No content of consciousness without an action of the brain-cells: every freshman has learned it in his college course. Psychology without a soul seemed at first the battle-cry of the progressives who wanted to liberate the science of the mind from the arbitrary speculations of the philosophers and wanted to substitute true knowledge for hazy dreams. But the battle was quickly won, and psychology without a soul became a matter of course. We might more easily lead biology back to the vague speculations a hundred years before Darwin than force psychology back to the metaphysical fancies of the believers in souls.

Some opposition to the soulless psychology started from the students of abnormal mental life who have opened the dark caves of the subconscious. While the routine psychologist searches and sifts the contents of consciousness, the physicians mock him for his narrowness. They claim that there are large parts of mental life of which we are never aware in consciousness. There are memories and emotions working in us which no psychological analysis can reach. All which we perform and experience consciously is only the product, not to say the by-product, of the deeper soul in us which thinks and acts independent of our conscious will.

In our dreams our deeper soul may throw some of its bubbling ideas into consciousness. In the diseased states of the hysteric

the conscious life becomes twisted by the subconscious emotions. In the queer cases of double personality and split consciousness the other individual in man appears in the daylight. We may tap the subconscious mind by hypnotism. We may even extract its secrets by experimental methods. The patient may have electrodes in his hands connected with a galvanometer which shows the excitement of the organism under mental influence. We speak to him about a hundred things, and suddenly the needle of the galvanometer shows violent disturbances. The patient does not feel anything, the words which he heard did not remind him of anything; and yet we can take this excitement which must go on in the subconscious mind as a starting-point for further inquiry, and slowly we discover that the words hurt a sore spot as they touched on some old, long-forgotten painful experiences in youthful days. The subconscious soul has held them and has brooded over them, while the conscious mind did not remember them. Thus the study of the conscious experiences of which the modern psychologist is so proud seems a sham success. The most important inner life may lie outside of the psychologist's hunting-ground. There may be a soul which is untouched by the mere analysis of consciousness.

The revolt which followed the discovery of the subconscious by the students of abnormal mental life is an interesting case of mass suggestion. The consistent psychologist must ask, with astonishment, why this noise and this perturbation about the hysterics and psychasthenics while every single normal man and woman and child in every hour at every task can demonstrate to us exactly the same interesting situation? Has any serious psychologist ever dreamt that he could explain everything which goes on in the mind from preceding happenings in consciousness? Fancy the simplest intercourse. You ask me where I spent my summer, and I answer with a story about the mountains and the seashore, about people and towns; and every word which I say is an action of mine which I as psychologist might try to explain from its causes. But can I really imagine that I can find those causes in the light of my consciousness?

We too easily disregard the real happenings during such trivial life affairs. We are speaking, and therefore we take it for granted that we prepared the sentences in our consciousness, that we selected the words, that we decided upon every idea. But if we stop and watch our experience we find it very different. I give my reply and am aware that I speak the words, and I hear

the words and understand them while I am speaking them, but no mental idea acts as pacemaker in my consciousness. The words break out of the darkness. I do not know them before I actually speak them. Somehow, somewhere outside of consciousness my thoughts and my words were chosen. When the iceberg is swimming through the ocean, ten times more is below the surface than above; but when our experiences, our emotions, our thoughts, our decisions, float through our inner life, a thousand times more is below the surface than above. Billions and trillions of experiences from the first breath to the moment which is just past must linger in us and fuse and rival one another and work together to produce the decision which flashes up in our mind or the solution of a problem which suddenly presents itself. Truly we do not need the hysterics to be reminded that the causes of a mental act cannot be found simply by disentangling the threads of our consciousness.

To be sure, the sober psychologist might warn the physician against his hasty hypothesis that these causes outside of consciousness must be subconscious mental states. He would tell him that such a theory of explanation is very illogical, but he would not for a moment deny the facts which the physician finds and which he wishes to see explained. He would insist that such a theory of the subconscious cannot possibly furnish the desired explanation, and that, on the other side, a much simpler explanation is at hand which is far more in harmony with all the other experiences. He would point, for instance, to our perceptions of the outer world. At this moment a hurdy-gurdy on the street disturbs my thinking. The tunes of the waltz rush into my consciousness. What is the cause of their unwelcome intrusion? Was my upper or my lower mind producing them out of its own resources? No one would believe that either was responsible. Those tones of the "Merry Widow" do not come from my subconscious mind, but they arise because my brain-cells are excited through the mechanisms in my ear, and those get their cue from the air-waves which the strings of the hurdy-gurdy stirred up. The music is in my consciousness because certain centers in my brain are made to act by preceding physical causes.

But if the brain action is responsible for all our hearing and seeing, it seems only natural to seek also in brain action the causes for our memory images. From this starting-point the psychologists have developed their modern theories, which assert that all the conscious states are accompaniments of brain

processes and that all the connecting acts which lie outside of consciousness are processes in the millionfold paths of the central nervous system. The rôle which the physician hastily ascribes to the subconscious is more consistently played by the brain. The subconscious itself is, of course, not accessible to any one; it cannot be anything but a hypothesis proposed to explain certain conscious facts. If it can be shown that these same facts can be explained better by another agency which we really know—namely, the brain—it is untenable to prefer the obscure hypothesis of a subconscious soul. Its only advantage would be that, as it can never become the object of real experience, we should not feel hampered in ascribing to that great unknown anything which is convenient.

One thing above all: whether we accept the explanation of mental life through the subconscious or reject it, in any case the subconscious mind as the physician or the psychologist understands it would necessarily have the character of an extremely complex mechanism. It would be composed of just as many elements as the brain, it would be just as atomistic as our surface mind, and it would be just as much controlled by rigid laws; in short, it would certainly not be a soul. The struggle about the subconscious which appeared to many an onslaught on the soulless psychology has brought the world not a step nearer to the realm of souls. Even if we prefer the subconscious for our explanations, we remain completely in that psychological world in which everything results from foregoing causes and must be explained from elementary processes. There is no freedom and no unity, and only in the valley of complete confusion some have provided such a hysteric subconscious mind with an attachment for wireless telephony to the absolute. The psychologist who is trying to explain must be loyal to his task. He cannot beguile himself with the luxury of a soul which seems to explain everything and explains nothing.

But may there not be a fundamental error at the bottom of this whole discussion? It seems as if there were only two alternatives open. We understand mental life by explaining it with the help of a soul, or we understand it by explaining it without a soul. But is there not an entirely different, third possibility—namely, that we understand inner life without trying to explain it? Is it not possible that human experience allows an entirely different approach? The world of the stars cannot be understood otherwise than by explaining every movement through laws from the foregoing causes. If we

should try to grasp the reality of the stars by seeking emotions in their twinkling or by linking them with human fate, we should have left the path of knowledge and should be speaking the inspired language of the poet and mystic or the uninspired but lucrative language of the astrologer. But if we deal with inner life it is not poetic nor mystic nor lucrative if we leave mere causal explanation and turn to an entirely different pathway: it leads to the problem of meaning.

Surely, if there is anything an actual fact in our mental experience it is that it has meaning for us who live through it and for those with whom we are in contact. To have a meaning and purpose and inner reference and aim is the most fundamental reality of our inner world. We do not propose it by a fancy of our imagination, but it is the rockbed of our inner life. Every idea and volition and emotion means something and points to some purpose, and if we leave this out we omit just the concrete fact. We may be doubtful whether our mental life has causes, but we cannot possibly doubt that it has a meaning. Even if we were doubtful about it, this doubt of ours would be such an act with meaning and purpose.

Yet, however astonishing it may appear, this meaning aspect was indeed left out by the modern student of inner life. He was hypnotized by the one aim, to describe mental life and to explain it—that is, to treat it as if it were simply a content of consciousness which is found, as the fish are found in a pond. But the psychologist ignored the most significant fact concerning the perceptions and feelings and volitions, that which cannot be described and explained, but which must be interpreted and referred to a purpose.

There is no scholarly research necessary to dig up this wisdom. If two men meet on the street and one says, "Fine weather to-day," and the other answers, "I think it will rain, after all," perhaps neither thinks of the fact that he has contents of consciousness, but both know exactly that they express a meaning. If we are really to give an exact and true account of our inner states we must surely develop the science of these meaning experiences, must interpret them, must show how one refers to another and how they are bound up with purposes and how one man understands the meaning of another.

This much-neglected meaning aspect of our self is not only real and important, but it is much more important than the explanatory aspect, because it is the only real one. The other, with which traditional psychology is satisfied, is by no means

real; it is artificial. It is a scientific construction which is far from our immediate life experience. It has value only as long as we stick to our purpose of getting an explanation of inner life. Yet this very purpose is foreign to the naïve mind. If we make ourselves understood, we take inner life only as a meaning and not as a cause and an effect. The enthusiasm for the study of the causes and laws in mental life was so overwhelming, and the joy in this new science of the mind after the pattern of the natural sciences was so intense, that the true inner life with its meaning and purpose became entirely neglected.

But the reaction had to come; and, suddenly, it is noticeable in many quarters. Through all kinds of side doors and back doors some elements of meaning are admitted into the description and explanation. The first result is often a rather confusing mixture. But signs are plentiful that this stage is only one of transition. The meaning of inner life will soon be admitted through the wide-open front door of the temple of science. Then we shall have two independent systems of psychology—a causal and a purposive one. In the one, the causal part, the psychologist studies mental life in that artificial setting in which it appears as a chain of causes and effects; and in the other, the purposive part, he studies it in that natural setting of real life in which every pulse-beat of experience is understood in its meaning and in its inner relations. Both are perfectly justified as long as they are not carelessly mixed and as long as neither is pushed forward as complete. In practical life the two views are intertwined. Thus our neighbor is first of all the personal self whom we try to understand by grasping the meaning of his ideas and intentions, but he may at any moment become to us a mere object of observation which we try to explain.

As soon as this purposive psychology is acknowledged as a full-fledged science we cannot go very far without discovering that it leads us straight to the old idea of the soul. We understand the meaning of a thought or memory or will act by linking it with the aim toward which it points, and this inner forward movement is understood as the act of a self. What do we know of this self? One thing above all—it is perfectly free. We saw that in this whole world of meaning everything is completely understood as soon as every act is linked with its purpose, hence we have no right at all to ask for causes. It has no subconscious causes, and it has no brain causes. The mere inquiry after its causes would falsify its status. It has

not causes any more than it has weight or color. Its whole reality lies in its purposiveness, and this detachment from any possible cause, this completeness in itself, is the fundamental freedom of the self which stamps it as a soul.

Moreover, for the causal psychologist, whether he be of the subconscious or of the physiological temper, mental life is a multitude of elements. The parts of the mind are externally linked, but they remain separate mental atoms. In the world with which the purposive psychologist is concerned one act is internally bound up with another, one idea means another, one thought refers to another, and every single act points backward to the self which expresses its meaning in its purposive deeds. This is a self which is not a mere pile of psychical doings, but which really asserts itself as the same in every new act. Everything which springs from it is involved in its selfhood. This is the true unity of the self which knows itself as the same in every function.

This soul, finally, cannot be dependent upon the beginning and the end, upon the days and the hours of the physical body. It expresses itself through the body, and the sense organs determine the selection of objects toward which it takes its attitudes, but the soul is neither in the time nor in the space of the physical molecules. If we curiously ask, "How can we describe the soul?" we must learn to recognize the absurdity of the very question. Every description refers to an object, but the essential meaning of the soul is that it is never an object, but always a subject, always a self, always an action. We cannot describe and we cannot explain it, not because our purposive psychology is still unfit for this task, but because the task itself would be meaningless. A soul must be understood in its unfolding and in the inner relation of its acts. We are still at the beginning of the soul psychology, but no doubt the soul has returned, and soon it will appear one of the most curious episodes of human civilization that it was possible for half a century to take a descriptive and explanatory account of mental life as the only real rendering of inner experience. The stubborn, one-sided, causal psychology which does not admit a soul psychology at its side will be "dead as a door-nail."

HUGO MÜNSTERBERG.